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Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701  
13 May 2003

Mr. William T. Hawks

Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Country of Origin Labeling Program

Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA

Stop 0249, Room 2092-S

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington DC 20250-0249

Dear Under Secretary Hawks:

I am writing to urge you to come up with simple, effective guidelines for the mandatory Country of Origin labeling program, such as those recommended by the Americans for Country of Origin Labeling Coalition.

I want Country of Origin labeling because I want to use my purchasing power to support domestic farmers and producers. The government and the big corporations may have betrayed and abandoned the workers and farmers of America who have supported them and on whose backs they have climbed to rise to where they are but I have not. I understand there is much controversy about how to implement mandatory country of origin labeling, and I urge you to keep several points in mind as you develop the rules.

Retailers and packers have already signaled their intent to put a greater burden on suppliers than is required by the Farm Bill. For example, some packers are demanding that producers obtain a third-party certification of origin. This is unnecessary and unfair to small producers who already face enough obstacles. Any labeling program should place a record-keeping burden only on processors/packers and retailers. This can be accomplished by giving the only authority to conduct audits to USDA, and instructing processors and retailers to add country of origin information to existing paperwork transactions.

In addition, USDA should maximize the number of foods that will be labeled. Enhancing a covered product by adding water, flavoring, salt, or

other seasoning should not exclude it from the labeling requirements, nor should cooking, curing, or roasting.

In short, I urge you to make sure that the rules for mandatory country of origin labeling live up to their potential, and allow me to know where my food is produced, just as I know where other consumer goods such as clothing are produced.

Sincerely,

Joe Alexander